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ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Eighth meeting of the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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Item 15 of the provisional agenda*

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Twenty-second session of the Commission/ thirteenth meeting of the Conference of Ministers

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
23 - 27 April 1987

Item 6 of the provisional agenda**

RESOLUTIONS AND DECISIONS ADOPTED BY THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL AT ITS SECOND REGULAR SESSION OF 1986 AND BY THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS FORTY-FIRST SESSION IN THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SECTORS THAT ARE OF INTEREST TO AFRICA

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1. The objective of the present document is to report to the Technical Preparatory Committee of the Whole and, through it, to the Conference of Ministers on (a) the action taken by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at its second regular session of 1986 on the resolutions adopted by the Conference of Ministers at its twelfth meeting and addressed to the Council; (b) the decisions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly at its forty-first session on the recommendations of the Council concerning these resolutions; and (c) other resolutions and decisions of the Council and the United Nations General Assembly in the economic and social sectors which are of interest to Africa.

2. At its twelfth meeting, which was also the twenty-first session of the Commission held in Yaounde, Republic of Cameroon, from 17 to 21 April 1986, the Conference of Ministers adopted 26 resolutions, three of which were addressed to the Economic and Social Council as they called for action by the Council and the United Nations General Assembly. These are: the United Nations Transport and Communications Decade in Africa [resolution 563 (XXI)], the Industrial Development Decade for Africa [resolution 564 (XXI)] and proposals for updating the 1986-1987 proposed programme budget in the light of the United Nations General Assembly approved appropriations and availability of extrabudgetary resources [resolution 582 (XXI)].

3. The second regular session of 1986 of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, from 2 to 23 July 1986. At this session, ECOSOC gave priority consideration to operational activities for development, the question of human resources and the role of technical cooperation in public management capacities.

4. In addition, the Council took up food problems, transnational corporations, new and renewable sources of energy, drought and desertification, the transport of dangerous foods, special economic humanitarian and disaster relief assistance, the effective mobilization of resources for the integration of women in development, and the development of energy resources of developing countries.

5. In opening the session, the President of ECOSOC, Mr. Manuel Dos Santos (Mozambique) said, inter alia, that the international issues of money, finance, resource flows, debt, trade, raw materials and development were the most delicate and crucial issues in the Council's agenda. The decision to choose these items as priorities was only justifiable and appropriate, he added.

6. Addressing the opening session, Mr. Javier Perez de Cuellar, United Nations Secretary-General, said that the world economy had recovered from the depths of the early 1980s and inflation was largely under control, but overall growth was relatively modest and many imbalances still prevail. After a decline in growth in 1985 compared to 1984, economic activity in the industrial countries now seem settled at around 3 per cent growth level accompanied by low inflation. Partly as a result of the recent decline in interest rates and in the price of oil, the economic climate in these countries has noticeably improved.

7. In the socialist countries, steady but modest economic growth has provided the framework for important and ambitious plans for structural transformation and growth and productivity. China made exceptional economic progress in 1984 and 1985, Mr. Perez de Cuellar observed.

8. With some exceptions, mainly in Asia, the growth rate in developing countries was affected by the slowdown in the industrial countries and, in far too many of these countries, living standards are still declining. Low commodity prices and protectionist barriers, combined with insufficient cash flows, prevent many of these countries from growing faster despite strong adjustment efforts and lower nominal interest rates.

9. The debt burden weighs heavily on a large number of these countries, especially in Africa and Latin America. Today, despite considerable international efforts and impressive domestic adjustment by the debtor countries, the problem is regrettably very far from resolution, and the social and political costs incurred in the adjustment are heavy indeed. The Secretary-General underlined the particular responsibility of the industrialized countries in the implementation of such solutions. Their ability to provide additional financial resources to developing countries and to absorb more imports from them has been considerably strengthened recently through their gains from the decline in the prices of commodities, including oil.

10. Mr. Perez de Cuellar then dwelt on the issues of debt and finance, commodity prices, the international energy situation and trade. Given the linkages between these issues and the need to discuss them not only technically but also at a political level, he emphasized that the United Nations has an important role to play in regard to them, inter alia, by giving impetus to negotiations taking place in more specialized fora. The deliberations at this session and during the next United Nations General Assembly would hopefully lead to the consideration of positive actions to remove the obstacles to accelerated growth and development, be they domestic or international.

11. Speaking on the economic situation in Africa, the Secretary-General reiterated his great satisfaction at the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the "United Nations Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development, 1986-1990". It was a major achievement for the African Governments themselves, he noted. It was also a success for the international community including this Organization. The special session had clearly demonstrated that when all parties displayed the essential political will, the work of the United Nations could lead to concrete positive results.

12. The United Nations Programme clearly indicated that the primary responsibility rested with African Governments, individually and collectively, to take the necessary action for their own economic growth and social progress. But the Programme of Action also stressed that Africa's economic development depends to a large extent on external support. In this context, the United Nations system was called upon both to contribute to the implementation of the Programme and to play a catalytic role in mobilizing the international community.

13. With regard to operational activities for development, the Secretary-General said one major component of the United Nations system's contribution to the development of African and other developing countries was its operational activities. Issues relating to co-ordination, in particular strengthening of the role of the Resident Co-ordinator, and improvement in ECOSOC's own capacity to conduct overall policy reviews, called for particular attention by the Council this year.

14. Turning to the need for strengthening the efficiency of the United Nations, Mr. Perez de Cuellar said that to fulfil its mandate, it was necessary to improve the efficiency of the Organization. In this connection, he expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Council and its subsidiary organs to rationalize and streamline its work. However, he pointed out that more could and must be done. There was need to re-examine the work of the United Nations in the economic and social sectors, to ensure mutually reinforcing efforts by the different organs, and to strengthen co-operation.

15. What was required above all, the Secretary-General said in concluding, was courageous thinking, bold vision, and political leadership to give the necessary impulse to strengthening co-operation within the United Nations system. The Council was ideally suited for performing such a task. It should assume once again the role that was foreseen by the Charter and thus contribute towards a better future for the world community.

16. The Council started its general discussion on international economic and social policy, including regional and sectoral development issues in the plenary on Thursday, 3 July 1986. As per the established practice, the Executive Secretaries of the United Nations regional commissions addressed the Council to report to it on the economic situation in their respective regions and on the activities of their commissions.

17. In his intervention on Monday, 7 July, the Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Professor Adebayo Adedeji, observed that the extraordinary economic and social difficulties confronting the African continent over the past three years or so had been the concern of the entire world community. There was no doubt that concern and understanding was in a large measure due to the attention that this Council had consistently paid to Africa. There was now, thanks to all concerned, a broad area of consensus and understanding as to the nature and extent of, and the type of solutions to, the African problems.

18. While the response of the international community at the United Nations General Assembly special session did not measure up entirely to Africa's various demands for long-term growth and development, he registered satisfaction that the session was a significant milestone in Africa's external relations and in the way the region's development goals and needs were perceived.

19. In 1985, he said, the rains returned to Africa and broke the back of the great drought of 1982-1984. Agricultural production was revived somewhat and overall gross regional output expanded by 28 per cent, a modest but most welcome development when compared with the rate of growth of GDP of only 1.2 per cent in 1984 and 0.5 per cent on the average during the period 1980-1984. The rise in total domestic output in 1985 was, however, virtually ineffectual in the face of the prevailing weaknesses in most other development parameters. The average debt service burden was at an all-time high in 1985 and had continued to rise. The external payments gap was at its widest in most countries. Fiscal deficits were the norm and in most countries there was no expansion in capital outlays. Compounding all this was the general slide in world prices of most commodities of export interest to Africa. The African crisis was, therefore, far from over, he declared.

20. Professor Adedeji then stated that 1986 was a crucial year for Africa. This was the year that the African people had decided to make a definite break with poverty and underdevelopment and sought the understanding of the entire international community through an unprecedented special session of the United Nations General Assembly.

21. In the remainder of his statement, the Executive Secretary, as has been his practice during the Council's annual session, provided participants with an overview of current developments and perspectives in the African economy and a report of the major issues dealt with by the twenty-first session of the Commission held at Yaounde, Cameroon, from 17 to 21 April 1986.

22. The session had before it the Commission's annual report for the period 30 April 1985 to 21 April 1986 as well as the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations regional co-operation which contained recommendations for action by the Council including the three resolutions from ECA referred to above. These three resolutions were submitted to the First (economic) Committee which examined them in the light of the current international financial crisis.

23. Regarding resolution 563 (XXI), Transport and Communications Decade in Africa (UNTACDA), once again ECOSOC witnessed a confrontation between Algeria and Morocco on the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of UNTACDA referred to in the resolution (specifically on the Lagos-Nouakchott Highway). The Executive Secretary made a statement to clarify the situation. His statement was based on the report of the fifth Conference of African Ministers of Transport, Communications and Planning, held in Harare, Zimbabwe in March 1986 and the annual report of the Economic Commission for Africa (document E/1986/33) with particular reference to the deliberations of the twenty-first session of the Commission and relevant decisions reached by the Commission on this same subject in Yaounde, in April 1986. After the clarification and an exchange of views, the resolution was adopted.

24. As for resolution 564 (XXI), Industrial Development Decade for Africa, the delegation of the United States of America, supported by some industrialized countries, strongly opposed operative paragraph 10 which appealed to the United Nations General Assembly to allocate ECA on an annual basis and as recommended by ECOSOC in resolution 1985/61 of 26 July 1985, the sum of $US 700,000 being the difference between the normal allocation of $US 5 million approved by United Nations General Assembly in resolution 39/233 of December 1984 for the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the annual amount of $US 4.3 allocated to the Decade in the 1986-1987 programme budget of the Organization. The resolution was then adopted as amended.

25. Resolution 582 (XXI), proposals for updating the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1986-1987 in the light of appropriations approved by the General Assembly and the availability of extrabudgetary resources, was unanimously adopted.

26. As is the practice, all resolutions adopted by ECOSOC should go also to the General Assembly for final adoption. Consequently the three above-mentioned resolutions were transmitted to the forty-first session of the General Assembly. Although due to budgetary constraints the Secretary to the Commission was unable to attend this year's session of the General Assembly, we have been informed that these three resolutions were adopted.

27. Other resolutions adopted by the General Assembly in the economic and social sectors which are of interest to Africa are those concerning assistance to certain African countries facing particular problems such as Benin, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Djibouti, the Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Madagascar and Sierra Leone. Note was taken of the decisions on countries stricken by drought and desertification in Africa, assistance to drought-stricken areas of Djibouti, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Somalia, the Sudan and Uganda. The General Assembly also took note of the Secretary-General's report on the Preferential Trade Area (PTA) for Eastern and Southern African States, and the report on the particular problems facing Zaire with regard to transport. Another resolution on special assistance to frontline States was also adopted.

28. Due to budgetary constraints and since major donors are more and more reluctant to adopt resolutions with financial implications, regional commissions were discouraged from submitting such resolutions. In fact, that was why last year in Yaounde, the Conference of Ministers had addressed three resolutions only to ECOSOC and the General Assembly and even then the resolution on the United Nations Industrial Development Decade for Africa which contained an operative paragraph with financial implications was dropped. Now that the United Nations financial crisis has not abated, it is therefore likely that any resolution with financial implications may not be examined.

29. Therefore in adopting resolutions for onward transmission to ECOSOC and the General Assembly, the Conference of Ministers may wish to bear this in mind.